

ORAL PRESENTATION

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“Healthy Anorexia”: rationalising contradictions

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From 2013 ANZAED Conference: Inspiring Change: Person and Context
Melbourne, Australia. 23-24 August 2013

This paper explores how young women with disordered eating rationalise their behaviour as ‘healthy’. Based on preliminary findings from an Australian Research Council grant that is investigating why people with eating disorders are reluctant to engage with treatment services, we demonstrate how young women use normative discourses of body surveillance, ‘healthy eating’ and self-discipline to maintain and support eating disorder practices. Healthy lifestyles are supported by a range of public health initiatives that promote ‘watching one’s weight’, taking regular exercise and eating foods that are low in fat. Such culturally sanctioned discourses are readily available for people with eating disorders to position themselves within, providing a normative space to practice body surveillance, and also a legitimate and moral claim to looking after oneself. Investigating the parameters in which people rationalise excessive dietary restriction, and over-exercising as a healthy lifestyle is important for early detection of eating disorders, and to the development of strategies that challenge the ease in which eating disorders can be hidden in everyday health practices.

This abstract was presented in the **Understanding and Treating Eating Pathology** stream of the 2013 ANZAED Conference.

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Published: 14 November 2013

doi:10.1186/2050-2974-1-S1-O67

Cite this article as: Musolino et al.: “Healthy Anorexia”: rationalising contradictions. *Journal of Eating Disorders* 2013 **1**(Suppl 1):O67.

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